The Cleveland Museum of Art

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ANNUAL *ASIAN AUTUMN* EXHIBITION AT THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART HIGHLIGHTS EARLY CERAMICS FROM JAPAN AND KOREA

With one of the most important collections of Asian art in the Western hemisphere, the Cleveland Museum of Art is able to offer every year a thematic exhibition of Asian art, using works drawn from its own collection. The annual show is called *Asian Autumn*; this year's edition of it, titled *Early Ceramics from Japan and Korea,* runs September 16 to December 3, 1995, and highlights the pottery of the hunting-gathering cultures of ancient Japan and Korea. Chief curator of Asian art Michael Cunningham, who organized this exhibition, says these works "remind us of the enduring fundamental relationship between humankind and clay, and of our need over the millennia of working clay to serve the functions associated with daily life."

The first human inhabitants of the Japanese archipelago came via land bridges from northern and southeast Asia some 30,000 years ago. These people lived more or less in isolation, but periodic infusions of culture came from the Asian mainland even after the sea level rose with the end of the last ice age. Korea, because of its physical proximity to the southern Japanese islands, was a particularly strong source of influence. The objects in this show, made between roughly 2500 B.C. and the 16th century, are remarkable not only for their inherent beauty, but also for their embodiment of modern notions of Japanese design. The basic curvilinear and angular forms seen in these works were established in Japan by 10,000 B.C., and are very much evident in 20th-century Japanese pottery—a three-millennium continuity of aesthetic attitude.

The earliest known Japanese ceramics, made between the 11th and fifth centuries B.C., are known as Jōmon wares. The entire prehistoric Jōmon culture derives its name from the method by which these ceramics were made: Jōmon means, literally, "cord motif." In an age before potter's wheels or kilns, artisans made vessels by building up basic forms with coils of clay, manipulating the soft surface to create the desired designs, sun-baking the pots until dry, then firing them in above-ground bonfires of piled brushwood.

The Jōmon people lived in tribal units along rivers and coasts of Japan, and each area is identified with unique variants in its ceramics. The northeast Niigata region, for example, pro-

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duced distinctive "flame pattern" vessels exemplified in this exhibition by an exuberant pot from about 2500 B.C., one of the largest and best-preserved examples of its type known to exist. The hunting-gathering Jōmon people used vessels—even spectacular creations like this one—mainly for cooking and for other, highly utilitarian purposes.

The era in Japanese history that followed the Jōmon was the Yayoi period, 400 B.C. to A.D. 250, during which new ideas and technologies from the Asian continent led to a number of milestones in the development of Japanese civilization, including the inception of the modern Japanese language, the first cultivation of rice, the proliferation of stone and iron tools, and the increasing political and social complexity that came with trade and communication with other cultures. Yayoi pottery was especially indebted to Korea—techniques and aesthetic ideas found in Korean artifacts repeatedly turn up subsequently in Japanese contexts. In surface appearance, Yayoi pottery looks quite different from the sculptural forms of classic Jōmon, but the old technique of hand-forming coils of clay to build up basic shapes continued. The artisans (who, like the Jōmon, are thought to have been mostly women) would then paddle, smooth, and scrape the forms to simplify them so that many objects look as if they might have been made on a potter's wheel. While Jōmon pots had been used almost exclusively for cooking, Yayoi examples reflect the increasingly agricultural society's need for large storage vessels. A red-burnished fourth-century vessel in the show is a prime example of a large Yayoi pot; based on archaeological evidence, this one was probably a ceramic used in rituals.

In the fourth and fifth centuries, Korea's foreign expansionist goals helped spread anew some of its technological innovations in the creation of ceramics: the potter's wheel, the chambered kiln, and better clays. A particular and common Japanese use of the new techniques was the creation of *haniwa,* large clay cylinders that acted as stands for burial goods within tombs. In time, the *haniwa* took on human or animal form (a fifth-century *Caparisoned Horse* in the exhibition is a fine example) and were placed in great numbers on slopes of aristocratic tomb mounds, where they looked impressive and increased the stability of the immense earthen structures.

Sue ware, descended from Korea's fifth-century Kaya stonewares, reflects the increasing importance in Japan of high-fired (relatively light in weight and hard) ceramics for religious and secular purposes. During the sixth century, the orderly production of ceramics took firm hold, as permanent kiln sites were established to make pottery for wide distribution. The forms and aesthetics exemplified by works such as a sixth-century sutra jar (used for burying precious Buddhist religious texts, reliquaries, and statues, which were also part of a tradition imported from the mainland) foreshadow the more famous achievements of the Muromachi period a thousand years later, while echoing the earliest Jōmon forms 10,000 years before: an elegant synthesis of curves and angles in form and decoration.

In another annual tradition, a variety of educational programs complement Asian Autumn; these include gallery talks, lectures, performances, videos, and a family program, all detailed on the accompanying sheet.